

Grace and Faith

1. The distinctive marks of Lutheran theology – which is Biblical theology/teaching are these:
 - a. sola gratia: grace alone
 - b. sola fide: faith alone
 - c. sola scriptura: Scripture alone
 - d. sola christus: Christ alone

Which is to say that we are saved BY grace alone THROUGH faith alone IN Christ alone and all of this is revealed to us and made sure ON THE BASIS OF Scripture alone.

2. All of these may be easily misrepresented. We need to be careful in our understanding and speaking about these.
3. Today's study is *sola gratia and sola fide*.

- a. Our salvation from start to finish is attributed to the grace of God ALONE.
- b. By definition grace is the free gift of God's love and mercy in Christ.
- c. Some break it down in the form of an acronym:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense

- d. Notice how in the following Scripture (Ephesians 2:8-10) both our justification (how we are saved) and our sanctification (how we are preserved to live in faith) are attributed to the grace and work of God, and not in anything we do!

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

- e. Even “our” good works come from the grace of God. He has prepared them and “we” do them because “we” are HIS “workmanship” (His new creation). New creation works come from His new creation people. Recall also that the “fruit” of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is just that: “of the [Holy] Spirit” and not us! God gets all the credit, because the fruit and good works belong to and come from HIM!

- f. Even our confession that “Jesus is Lord” is by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3b)! Even our confession of faith in Christ is a gift from God and comes from God!
 - g. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Lord (James 1:17).
 - h. We can NEVER pat ourselves on the back for our knowledge of salvation, our saving confession, faith, good works, holy impulses, worship, etc. We must always give all the glory to God alone. All of these things are accomplished by His grace!
4. We also understand the above to be true if we truly understand the Biblical teaching of original sin and total depravity. In summary this means that on account of our sinful condition at birth and before conversion we are spiritually dead. In a previous session, we studied Ephesians 2:1:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...”

- 5. This is to say that if we truly understand spiritual depravity before conversion, we will *also understand if not for the grace of God we would be eternally condemned*. It is impossible for a dead person to save himself!
- 6. Thus we are led back to the Biblical necessity of *sola gratia/grace alone*.
- 7. This must have a radical affect on our speech, our writing, our singing, our communication, our working with the people who come to our Christian congregation!
- 8. For one, it makes us mindful to watch out for “decision theology.” This is the idea that the way that one comes to Christ is to ask the Lord into one’s heart.
- 9. Christ says in John 15:16:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit...”

- 10. We have faith *not* because we choose Christ, but because Christ chooses us IN GRACE.
- 11. Consider John 6:37, 39, 44 and 65:

John 6:37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

- a. Now ask yourself this question, “According to this verse, how does anyone come to Christ?” Answer: Those who come to Christ are those whom The Father _____ to Christ.

John 6:39: ***“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”***

b. Again, we are GIVEN to Christ! This is the epitome of GRACE!

John 6:44: ***“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”***

c. Now ask, “According to this verse, how does one come to Christ?” Answer: Those who come to Christ are _____ by the Father.

John 6:65: ***“He went on to say, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.’”***

d. According to Jesus Christ, the way that we come to Him is through the Father ENABLING us. This is grace!

12. The formal teaching of all of this is called “Divine Monergism.” These terms mean that God (Divine) is the ONLY POWER (Monergism) that is responsible for our salvation. This points to the grace of God as that which comes from God and God alone. This teaching is directly opposed to the false teaching of “Synergism” which means “working with” God (cooperating with God).

13. Misleading synergism is expressed in the inaccurate concept: “God has done His part, He is now waiting for you to do your part/or to respond.” This SOUNDS good to the sinful nature, because the sinful nature wants to take credit for having contributed to salvation. The sinful nature wants us and the people we serve to take credit for our Christian faith. This is good for our pride and ego! But it also contradicts the Word of God.

14. Big Point: This is not mere theology, there is a HUGE practical side to this:

If a person is led to the point that their Christian faith also rests on them – that we must do something to complement the grace of God to become a Christian or remain a Christian – then invariably we will start to focus not on Christ, but on our performance.

At this point, we lose sight of what faith is all about if we start looking at our performance instead of Jesus. But in God’s grace, we are taught:

1. NOT to have faith in faith.

2. The Lord calls us to have faith in Christ. Here we must understand the significance of “sola fide.”

Bottom line, the danger in abandoning grace alone is that our peace and assurance as Christians may shift from Christ to what we do, our experience, how we perform, our conduct, our track record, the way we feel, even OUR faith, but all of these are sinking sand!

15. Grace alone and divine monergism are best illustrated this way:

- a. Creation (the world and universe): God said, “Let there be light.” And what happened? What did the creation itself contribute to this creating event?
- b. Creation (man): God breathed into the dust. We are dirt. Ever observe dirt? How productive is dirt? How much faith can dirt muster up?
- c. Lazarus when he was buried: Jesus said, “Lazarus, come out!” What did Lazarus “do” before Jesus called Him? Did Lazarus negotiate and deliberate within himself, “I am going to respond to Jesus!”? No! Was the call of Jesus to Lazarus dependent on Lazarus? Absolutely not!
- d. Child-Birth: How active were you when you came out of your mother’s womb? When you were in the womb and the doctor said “push,” he was not speaking to you!

16. This is to say that when it comes to grace alone:

- a. God is active.
- b. We are passive.

17. So, how does a person come to Christ?

- a. It is not by what we do in letting, in welcoming, in asking, in accepting, in allowing, in opening, etc.
- b. It is by what GOD does through His Word.

18. Where does faith in Christ come from?

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).”

19. Faith is CREATED BY THE POWER OF THE WORD OF CHRIST. The orthodox Lutheran fathers taught that faith was an organ. Like your heart is a physical organ, faith is a spiritual organ that God creates.

20. God created your physical heart and by virtue of it being a healthy heart, it pumps blood. That’s what a created heart does.

21. God created your faith and by virtue of it being a healthy faith, it “pumps” trust or holding to Christ. That’s what a created faith does.
22. But this is not our work, it is God’s work. We certainly experience this faith and this faith is in us; it is truly ours since God gave it to us and created it in us, *but its formation, its existence is from God!*
23. Please read Luther’s definition here (from his introduction to Romans):

Faith is not what some people think it is. Their human dream is a delusion. Because they observe that faith is not followed by good works or a better life, they fall into error, even though they speak and hear much about faith. “Faith is not enough,” they say, “You must do good works, you must be pious to be saved.” They think that, when you hear the gospel, you start working, creating by your own strength a thankful heart which says, “I believe.” That is what they think true faith is. But, because this is a human idea, a dream, the heart never learns anything from it, so it does nothing and reform doesn't come from this ‘faith,’ either.

Instead, faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire! Therefore, watch out for your own false ideas and guard against good-for-nothing gossips, who think they're smart enough to define faith and works, but really are the greatest of fools. Ask God to work faith in you, or you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you wish, say or can do.

24. So practically speaking how are we “involved” in *sola gratia*? Answer: We simply receive, are washed in and with, take and eat, take and drink, have placed on us ***the Word of Jesus Christ! Where Christ has promised His presence, where He has placed His***

promise; where He has identified where His Word is tangible, hearable, receivable in this physical realm, there faith is given, there faith is created, there faith is received. Through this Word the Holy Spirit works this way (as we confess in the third article of the Creed as recorded in Luther's Small Catechism):

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

Thus we do not invite Christ into our hearts, but rather He invites and puts us into His!

Postscript:

1. What about Rev. 3:20? Answer: This is spoken to converted Christians from Laodicea. Point: Always consider the audience -- the addressees -- in Scripture. This is not to be applied to the unconverted.
2. Didn't Christ ever bid people to "come" or "believe"? Answer: Yes, He did, but this is called a "Gospel imperative" where the voice of God/Word of God contains the power to accomplish that which it bids to do. This is exactly the same as Christ saying to Lazarus, "Lazarus come out!" It is like a father or mother walking up to their baby and scooping them up while saying, "Come here you!"
3. But if we are saved only by God's election, then what about our free will? Answer: The Bible teaches that spiritual free-will was lost after the Fall of Man. This is distinct from psychological/natural free-will. We have free-will to decide whether to eat at McDonalds or In and Out, but apart from the drawing of the Holy Spirit we do not have the power to choose Christ (remember Eph. 2:1 which teaches that we are spiritually dead before conversion). We have "natural" free-will, but not "spiritual" free-will. Sin coming into the world took away our ability to choose God. After conversion, you begin to have a born-again spiritual will so that you experience new impulses including the desire and choosing to follow Christ. However, even this born-again condition is completely dependent on the grace of God!
4. But if we are saved by God's election, why are only some people saved? Answer: This is a great mystery that should lead us to be all the more eager to share the saving Gospel of Christ to the world! Some Christians have insisted that we must have a better answer to this question and have postulated "double predestination" (that from eternity God chose some to go to heaven and chose others to go to hell), but we reject this teaching because it limits what Jesus did on the cross for the sins of the WORLD. Lutheran Christians consider the teaching of election or predestination to be entirely bound to the Gospel

alone. That is the purpose of the doctrine of election is to give assurance to those who trust in Christ alone. Election is not intended to terrify consciences, but to give comfort to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Those whom He elected have been called (by the Gospel) and those He has called have been justified. You have been justified because Jesus died and rose for you (Romans 8:30).

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